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AGRICULTURE

Village Mirabs Confer on Irrigation Issues: In Afghanistan, every village has a *mirab* – a water master – who is in charge of managing local irrigation resources. It is a critical function in this water-stressed country, as the majority of Afghans make their living from farming irrigated land. Without proper management of the irrigation systems, food production and incomes would fall.

On February 20-21, nearly 50 mirabs from villages in Nangarhar, Laghman, and Kunar provinces gathered for a USAID-facilitated workshop in Jalalabad to share their views on water management issues. The



Mirabs discuss water management challenges in small groups.

PHOTO: USAID/AWATT

workshop was the first of its kind in the country. It was initiated by the Department of Irrigation in the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), which oversees irrigation issues under Afghanistan's Water Law. Ultimately, such meetings will improve collective water use and allow mirabs to learn from each other's experiences.

The mirabs discussed the key challenges they face, noting the need for new irrigation canals to bring uncultivated land to life, and the need to rehabilitate old irrigation systems filled with silt. At the same time, they expressed pride in recent accomplishments made possible by funding from the U.S. Government, which enhanced their ability to export seedlings. "Thanks for the support [USAID] provided for the Irrigation Department to have the mirabs' conference," commented Fayez Naseer Ahmad, MAIL's Director of Irrigation. "It was very useful and important for us."



Teachers learn to use a model clock to teach students how to tell time during a PACE-A teacher training session.

PHOTO: USAID/PACE-A

EDUCATION

Improving Reading and Math Instruction in Community-based Schools: In Afghanistan, many remote areas lack formal primary schools, and the Ministry of Education and the U.S. Government are working together to extend coverage to these underserved villages. To ensure that all Afghan children have the opportunity to receive an education, USAID's Partnership for Advancing Community Education in Afghanistan (PACE-A) project establishes community-based primary school classes and trains Afghans to teach them.

Through PACE-A, USAID recently provided training

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for 108 teacher trainers from 18 provinces in Afghanistan. The training will improve teachers' capacity to teach reading to rural students in community classes throughout the country. The teachers also learned to use math manipulatives, which are toys or tools that physically demonstrate mathematical concepts, to enrich regular math instruction. USAID will provide follow-up training to more than 2,000 rural teachers in time for the start of the 2010 school year in late March.

"I appreciate the efforts of teacher support working group members in initiating this training to improve the quality of interaction between the students and teachers," said Nahid, one of the teacher trainers. "I think these trainings will be even more effective [when] the support group actually visits the schools, observes the teachers, and evaluates teaching performance to achieve better results in student performance," she added.

New Training Materials for Science and Math

Teachers: To ensure that Afghanistan's teachers are equipped to provide a quality education to their students, the U.S. Government and the Ministry of Education work together to ensure proper teacher training. Recently, the Ministry of Education's Teacher Education Department (TED) and USAID produced a training manual for grades 7-12 science and math teachers. The workshop participants also designed 36 training sessions that will reach 14,000 teachers across 11 provinces in Afghanistan between March and June 2010. Senior trainers successfully



USAID and Ministry of Education officials work together to develop teacher training materials.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

piloted the training sessions, including *General Math Methods*, *Problems and Challenges of Teaching Trigonometry*, and *Developing Lesson Plans for Geology*.

"Development of this manual will have a significant impact on the quality of education in Afghanistan and will be useful for school teachers, especially in the provinces and in remote areas, who have limited educational qualifications," affirmed an experienced member of the TED. "We have witnessed their weaknesses during our observations, and I think this manual can help solve most of their methodological problems."

This collaborative effort in materials development for in-service teacher training demonstrates the strong and lasting partnership between the U.S. Government and the Ministry of Education's Teacher Education Department.

International Computer Certification Builds Capacity: Computer literacy is a skill in high demand by employers throughout Afghanistan, and USAID is supporting improved computer instruction in Afghanistan's school system. On February 12, a group of 13 Professional

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Development Center (PDC) coordinators throughout Afghanistan received International Computer Driving License (ICDL) certificates. The ICDL is an internationally recognized certification indicating superior end-user computer skills.



Participants receive their ICDL certificates at Kabul Education University.

PHOTO: USAID/HEP

The 13 recipients are now certified to administer the ICDL examination in Afghanistan. This is the first step in ensuring that more people have the opportunity to take the exam and become computer skills trainers, increasing the number of expert computer users in the country.

The ICDL provides a framework for building skills in the workforce, which will boost the fast-growing area of IT in institutions throughout the country. Khalil Frough, PDC coordinator at Parwan University said "ICDL helps me to enhance my own computer skills and teach others in a better way, in order to have a brighter Afghanistan." ICDL certification is now available at 16 faculties of education, the Afghanistan

Technical and Vocational Institute, and the American University of Afghanistan.

PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM

Canal Wall Construction Creates Jobs and Protects Crops: Most residents of Joybar village in the southeastern part of Kapisa province depend on agriculture as their main source of income. Fields are irrigated by a local canal, which is easily damaged by heavy rains. Flooding diverts water from Joybar's fields, reducing agricultural output and putting many farmers' livelihoods in jeopardy.

Through its Local Governance and Community Development (LGCD) program, USAID is working with local officials and villagers to build a protection wall for the canal. The project, which is providing employment for approximately 20 Joybar residents for



Joybar villagers are building a protection wall along the canal to keep flooding from damaging their crops. PHOTO: USAID/LGCD

25 days, will ultimately benefit the entire village by increasing agriculture output and quality. As with all LGCD projects, this effort aims to improve lives in ways that are tangible and direct, while ensuring sustainability and stability by involving local officials in the process.

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A Shindand resident carries her USAIDfunded winterization kit. PHOTO: USAID/LGCD

Shindand District Government Supports Vulnerable Families: Weathering Afghanistan's long winter is difficult for many families, especially for those that cannot afford enough food and warm clothing. The U.S. Government is helping the government in Shindand district, Hirat province respond to citizens' needs by providing winterization kits containing coats, blankets, charcoal, rice, beans, and cooking oil. On February 14, local officials distributed the kits to 120 of the district's most vulnerable families, such as those led by women or ex-combatants.

Underscoring the Afghan government's commitment to its citizens, the distribution ceremony was attended by representatives from the Directorate of Women's Affairs, the Peace and Reconciliation Committee, and the District Development Assembly as well as Shindand's mayor, governor, and delegate to the Hirat Provincial

Council. The enthusiasm of the beneficiaries and participating officials demonstrates the impact USAID is having through its Local Governance and Community Development (LGCD) program. Through LGCD, USAID is working to bring stability to Afghan provinces and districts by building links between citizens and their government representatives.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Women Entrepreneurs in Kandahar Improve
Business Skills: Women are a growing force of
economic growth in Afghanistan, and the U.S.
Government is committed to building their capacity for
success. From support to women's business
associations to banking outreach programs aimed at
women, USAID is providing women entrepreneurs the
tools they need to succeed in the business world.

On January 26, 40 women business owners in Kandahar province completed a three-month business development training course. The course provided training in accounting, management, and marketing.



A woman entrepreneur receives her business development course certificate of completion. PHOTO: USAID/ASMED

Through lectures and group discussions, the participants learned how to improve their record keeping and accounting, manage their business environment, increase their client base, and improve product quality. The participants agreed that their new skills will improve their business operations, enabling them to earn more income to support their families.